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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 003203

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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/BCLTV, S/CT.  
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SUBJECT: THAILAND: DEALING WITH CONSPIRACY THEORIES ABOUT  
U.S. INVOLVEMENT IN SOUTHERN VIOLENCE

REF: A. BANGKOK 2062

[1](#)B. 04 BANGKOK 8629

Classified By: Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce. Reason 1.4 (d)

[1](#)1. (S) SUMMARY: As separatist violence escalates in Thailand's deep South, USG officials must deal with the persistent and perhaps widening perception in the Thai public that the United States is fomenting the violence for its own purposes. When traveling in Thailand's southern provinces, Embassy officers frequently encounter such notions even among otherwise rational interlocutors. Recently, the slander has gained greater prominence, including outside the South and Muslim communities, because irresponsible journalists and politicians repeat it in the national Thai media. Concerned about the impact of such rumors, a National Security Council (NSC) advisor has quietly proposed to the Ambassador that he meet with prominent southern Muslims leaders to dispel them. NSC is vetting the idea with Prime Minister Thaksin. The rumors, which would be laughable under less serious circumstances, are pervasive enough that they should be kept in mind when considering USG programs for the South. END SUMMARY

PERSISTENT THEORIES THAT THE U.S. IS BEHIND THE SOUTHERN VIOLENCE...

[1](#)2. (C) During regular reporting trips to southern Thailand, Emboffs are routinely pressed about U.S. intentions in the region, with clear suggestions that the U.S. is behind the violence there. For example, journalists "ambushed" our newly arrived RSO, on a familiarization tour of the South, insinuating his visit was evidence of U.S. "involvement" in the region. Every disparate scrap of news is threaded into the questions as "evidence." The arguments usually are variations on two conspiratorial themes: 1) the U.S. Military is inciting Muslims to violence in order to justify establishing bases in the region; 2) the CIA is funding the insurgents in order to justifying an expanded U.S. presence in the region for the Global War on Terror.

THE MEDIA AMPLIFIES THE RUMORS...

[1](#)3. (C) These assertions have begun to get national attention because of irresponsible, sensationalist journalists. Distorted versions of the rationale behind the RSO's visit were given widespread airtime, far beyond what they warranted (reftel B). Recently one of the most persistently anti-American of the conspiracy minded journalists tried to drag the Ambassador into the debate about who is behind southern violence. In a March 28 editorial in the daily "Matichon" newspaper, Taweesak Butratan characterized the mere arrival in Thailand of Ambassador Boyce as evidence of a plan to directly involve the U.S. in the South and expand our influence throughout Southeast Asia. (Note: Matichon has a daily circulation of over 150,000; and is targeted at an educated, middle-class readership. End Note)

POLITICIANS JOIN IN...

[1](#)4. (C) Some politicians have used the allegations for cheap publicity or to grind ideological axes. Perayot Rahimmula, a new Democrat Party (DP) MP and ex-academic specializing in Islamic issues -- and a former close contact of the Embassy -- argued during an April parliamentary debate that the CIA is involved in the southern situation and is trying to create the conditions necessary to justify U.S. intervention. Perayot said he also supported earlier comments in Parliament by Bangkok Senator Sophon Suphaphong -- a member of the recently establish National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) -- who suggested that the Pentagon orchestrated recent bombings in the South in order to pave the way for the U.S. to seek UN approval for intervention to Thailand.

SOME RTG OFFICIALS CONCERNED ABOUT THE RUMORS

[1](#)5. (S) Recent conversations with Thai NSC officials indicate that some RTG officials are concerned about the potential impact of these rumors. In March, Dr. Mark Tamthai, a senior NSC advisor, told the Ambassador that

senior officials in the RTG have discussed the allegations of a U.S. hand in the South, noted that the stories are widely believed, and are eager to dispel them (reftel A). The rumors hurt the bilateral relationship and the Thaksin Administration fears being painted as facilitating behind-the-scenes U.S. activities in the South. Tamthai proposed that the Ambassador speak with six prominent Muslim-Thai leaders and directly deny rumors of American involvement in the violence in southern Thailand. Tamthai said that such a meeting would require political approval at the "highest levels" (i.e., Prime Minister Thaksin). Subsequently, Somkiat Boonchoo, Director of the Bureau of Strategic Studies at the NSC, told Poloff that the NSC is drafting a proposal to hold such a meeting. Somkiat confirmed that Prime Minister Thaksin himself would be asked to sign off on the proposal.

COMMENT - IMPACT OF BAD PERCEPTIONS MUST BE WEIGHED IN PROGRAM DESIGN

16. (C) COMMENT: The allegations that the U.S. is fomenting violence in the South are widely believed in southern Thailand, and a few irresponsible and opportunistic politicians and conspiracy-minded journalists are helping to spread them throughout the country. Despite the ridiculous nature of the rumors, they must be factored in whenever the USG considers offering the RTG assistance and civilian and military programs geared towards the South. Clever propagandists among those who wish us ill, or those who are willing to believe anything, are too ready to misinterpret USG programs -- no matter how innocuous or well intentioned -- as evidence of more sinister purpose. The RTG is sensitive to the political impact of the allegations about U.S. activities, and has made clear its reluctance to accept assistance in the South, or to be linked to programs that might exacerbate internal tensions. END COMMENT  
BOYCE